25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE NEW X-MEN

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#3 of 5

CLAREMONT
THOMAS
WALLER

X-MEN®
BLACK SUN™

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X-MEN BLACK SUN

THIRD SPELL: BARE THE CLAWS!

A **CAIRN** OF STONES MAY BE MANY THINGS:
A **MONUMENT**... A **LANDMARK** ... OR A **TOMBSTONE**.
IT'S **DEATH** THAT RESIDES WITHIN **THIS** CAIRN, ON WHOSE FACE A **PORTAL OF ENERGY** SUDDENLY ROILS AND WRITHES.
AND DEATH WANTS **OUT**.
IT GETS ITS WAY.
IMAGINE THE **N'GARAI** AS MEN AND MUTANTS FIRST BEHELD THEM, NOT ALL THAT MANY YEARS AGO.
NOW PICTURE A N'GARAI **EVOLVED** A LIGHT-YEAR ALONG SOME GROTESQUE **EVOLUTIONARY HIGHWAY**.
THAT IS WHAT EMERGES FROM THE CAIRN ... ALL SHARP EDGES ... CLAWS AND TEETH AND SPIKES.
THIS IS A CREATURE WHOSE ESSENCE IS MURDER.
AND IT'S LOOKING FOR **PREY**!

CHRIS CLAREMONT Story
ROY THOMAS Script
KARL WALLER Artist
POP VISUALS Lettering
TOM SMITH Colorist
MIKE MARTS Editor
BOB HARRAS E-I-C

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INSTEAD -- IT BECOMES PREY.
A BLINDING BEAM ...
... RAW SOLAR PLASMA, PIERCING ITS ARMORED TORSO LIKE A MACK TRUCK THROUGH TOILET PAPER.
GET BACK, FANG-FACE! BACK TO WHATEVER SNAKEPIT YOU CRAWLED OUT OF!
THE WORDS ARE BARELY OUT OF NEAL SHAARA'S MOUTH --
-- BEFORE THE FORCE OF HIS ENERGY BOLT HAS HURLED THE N'GARAI BACK THROUGH THE OPEN PORTAL --
-- WHICH CLOSES AS SUDDENLY AND STARTLINGLY AS IT HAD OPENED.
YOU SEE THAT? I NAILED THE SONUVA --
WHAT I SEE, THUNDERBIRD, IS THAT THE CAIRN ITSELF, BEING SORCEROUS, REMAINS UNSCATHED.
CAN'T YOU EVEN LET ME ENJOY ONE LOUSY MOMENT OF TRIUMPH?
SAVOR IT SWIFTLY -- FOR A MOMENT IS ALL IT IS LIKELY TO BE.
BUT IT IS BETSY -- PSYLOCKE -- WHO CONCERNS US NOW.

YEAH, SHE REALLY GOT HAMMERED WHEN **STORM** ATTACKED US.
THAT WAS A **N'GARAI,** WEARING STORM'S BODY.
I'LL TAKE HER INSIDE.
WHY DO I HAVE THE SINKING FEELING THAT THIS ***ISN'T*** REALLY THE X-MANSION AT ALL?
Last issue. -- Mike
FULL MARKS FOR ***YOU,*** THUNDERBIRD.
I AM ***MAGIK...***
... AND WE ARE IN ***LIMBO,*** THE SORCEROUS DOMAIN OF WHICH I AM THE PUTATIVE ***PROTECTOR.***
MAGIK? THE X-MEN TOLD ME YOU WERE ***DEAD*** -- BUT HEY, I'LL LET THAT SLIDE.
STILL, IF YOU'RE IN CHARGE HERE, HOW COME ***THAT*** THING'S ON YOUR -- ***OUR*** -- FRONT LAWN?
THE CREATURE YOU SLEW WAS THE VANGUARD OF AN INVADING DEMON-HORDE FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION CALLED THE ***N'GARAI.***
THEY ARE BENT ON THE ***CONQUEST OF EARTH.***
AND THE DETAILS CONCERNING MY... ***DEATH...*** ARE OF ***MY CONCERN.***
FAIR ENOUGH.
ON THE OTHER HAND -- WHY SHOULD I ***BELIEVE*** YOU?
I'VE NEVER LAID EYES ON YOU ***OR*** THESE PLUG-UGLIES YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT --
-- OR ***LIMBO,*** EITHER.
AND HOW'D YOU PULL THAT LITTLE TRICK WHERE YOU SUCKED ***ARCHANGEL*** INTO YOUR ***SWORD?***
WELL? CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE?
I ... SIMPLY NEVER IMAGINED THAT MY IDENTITY OR CREDENTIALS WOULD BE ***DOUBTED.***
ON THE OTHER HAND, WHAT ELSE SHOULD I EXPECT FROM THE ***NEWEST*** OF THE X-MEN?
WELL? I'M WAITING FOR YOU TO CONVINCE ME.
I WON'T CONVINCE YOU ...

I'LL **SHOW** YOU!
PERHAPS ONE OF THE X-MEN HAS **TOLD** YOU --
-- HOW THE LATE **CYCLOPS** ACCIDENTALLY BLASTED THE TOP OFF **ANOTHER** SUCH CAIRN --
-- FREEING THE DEMONLORD **KEIRROK** IN THE PROCESS.
KEIRROK WAS THE **FIRST** OF THE **N'GARAI** TO ENCOUNTER THE X-MEN.
BUT, EVEN AFTER **STORM** DESTROYED KEIRROK'S PRECIOUS CAIRN --
-- HE WOULD NOT BE THE **LAST** SUCH DEMON TO APPEAR.
THE **DEMONIC AGENT** RESPONSIBLE FOR SETTING THE N'GARAI'S **CURRENT PLAN** IN MOTION IS AN ANCIENT SORCERER NAMED **BELASCO**.
OVER TIME, HE AND THE N'GARAI HAVE COME TO VIEW THE X-MEN AS THE **PRIMARY OBSTACLE** TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THEIR MUTUAL GOAL --
-- THE RESTORATION OF THE PRIMEVAL **ARCANE ORDER** ON EARTH, WHERE THE **N'GARAI** RULE -- AND HUMANITY EXISTS SOLELY TO BE THEIR **PREY**.
THE **HATRED** THAT BELASCO AND THE N'GARAI HAD FOR MUTANTS -- AND FOR THE **X-MEN** IN PARTICULAR -- STEMS FROM THAT BELIEF.
Magik's N'Garai newsreel courtesy of Uncanny X-Men # 96 & #143. -- Mike

WHAT IN BLAZES HAVE I GOTTEN MYSELF *INTO,* JOINING THIS TEAM?
WHAT ARE YOU *DOING?*
SZATTCH
WHAT DOES IT *LOOK* LIKE?
I'M CUTTING LOOSE WITH A *FULL POWER BLAST!*
YEAH ...
... LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE RIGHT.
SO, *"MAGIK"* -- WHY DON'T YOU LIVE UP TO YOUR NAME AND *PULVERIZE* THAT ROCKPILE?
MY POWER IS NEEDED TO BATTLE *BELASCO.*
HE'S FOUND A WAY TO OPEN THIS *PORTAL* BETWEEN WORLDS, UTILIZING THE SOULS OF HIS *ENEMIES.*
SAVE YOUR *ENERGY,* THUNDERBIRD.
UNLIKE THE N'GARAI YOU SLEW, THE *CAIRN* CAN ONLY BE HARMED BY *MAGIC.*
THUS HE HOPES TO ACHIEVE BOTH *REVENGE* -- AND THE *N'GARAI RESTORATION.*
HIS TARGETS ARE THE *ORIGINAL* X-MEN -- AND HIS SO-CALLED *"CATSPAWS"* ARE THOSE WHO *REPLACED* THEM -- THE *"NEW X-MEN".*
ORIGINALS LIKE *ARCHANGEL,* WHO YOU PULLED INTO YOUR --
SOULSWORD. YES.
IT WAS THE ONLY THING THAT MIGHT POSSIBLY *SAVE* WARREN.
THE KEY TO BELASCO'S PLAN IS THE GENERATION OF FIVE MYSTIC *BLOODSTONES* -- FROM THE SOULS OF HIS *FIVE TARGET X-MEN.*
MY JOB IS TO *FOIL* THAT PLAN -- *YOURS,* TO HOLD THE *N'GARAI* AT BAY.
WAIT! CAN'T YOU FIRST TAKE *BETSY* TO ... SAFETY ...?
MAGIK IS GONE. BUT HE KNOWS WHAT SHE WOULD HAVE SAID:
*IF THE X-MEN **SUCCEED,** PSYLOCKE'S SAFETY IS ASSURED.*
*IF THEY **DON'T** -- IT WON'T MATTER **WHERE** SHE IS, ON LIMBO **OR** ON EARTH.*

HAMMER BAY.
CAPITAL OF THE ISLAND NATION OF GENOSHA.
THE CIVIL WAR IS ALL BUT OVER.
RECONSTRUCTION IS WELL UNDERWAY.
RECONSTRUCTION NOT ONLY OF PHYSICAL REALITY --
-- BUT ALSO OF THE WAY THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION SPINS THAT REALITY FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.
... AND THE PLAIN TRUTH IS, THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN OUR NATION HAS STABILIZED.
SOCIAL ORDER HAS ONCE MORE BEEN RESTORED ...
... UNDER THE BENEVOLENT RULE OF MAGNETO!
LOOK AROUND YOU. STRUCTURES ARE GOING UP ALL OVER GENOSHA --
-- TALLER AND LOVELIER THAN THOSE THAT FELL IN THE RECENT UNPLEASANTRIES ...
... AND MUTANT ACOLYTES PATROL THE CITY NIGHT AND DAY, TO KEEP THE PEACE.
EVEN THE U.N. OBSERVER CORPS HAS CERTIFIED THAT OUR BEAUTIFUL LAND HAS AGAIN BECOME ...
... A SAFE PLACE TO VISIT.
KINDA MAKES YOU FEEL WARM ALL OVER, DON'T SHE?
'SCUSE ME. FORGOT WHO I WAS TALKIN' TO FOR A SECOND.
COME ON. TIME TO MOVE OUT.
5

DRAKE? SOMETHING THE MATTER, BOY?
"IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?" ARE YOU KIDDING? HOW CAN YOU BE SO -- PARDON THE PUN -- COOL ABOUT ALL THIS?
MAGNETO WAS THE FIRST ENEMY THE X-MEN BATTLED.
I WAS THE YOUNGEST, LOGAN. I'LL NEVER FORGET HOW SCARED I WAS DURING THAT BATTLE ...
... OR THE NIGHTMARES I HAD FOR WEEKS AFTERWARDS.
BUT THIS -- THIS IS A NIGHTMARE COME TO LIFE! IT'S LIKE EVERYTHING THE X-MEN HAVE FOUGHT FOR MEANS NOTHING.
TELL THAT TO CHUCK.
HE LET THOSE MORONS IN THE U.N. GIVE MAGNETO GENOSHA.
In X-Men #87. -- Mike
THE SITUATION WASN'T THAT SIMPLE. BESIDES, I THOUGHT YOU AND PROFESSOR X BURIED THAT HATCHET.
WE DID. DOESN'T MEAN I HAVE TO LIKE IT -- OR THAT I AGREE WITH WHAT HE DID.
GENOSHA IS A COUNTRY WHOSE SOCIETY WAS BUILT ON THE ENSLAVEMENT OF MUTANTS ...
... BUT YOU DON'T REPLACE HATE WITH HATE.
WELL, THAT'S WHAT WE'RE HERE TO MAKE SURE DOESN'T HAPPEN.
WE NEED TO ASCERTAIN EXACTLY WHAT THE STATUS OF HUMANS HERE IS, AND GET OUT QUICKLY.
MAYBE I'LL STAY BEHIND AN' FINISH WHAT CHUCK WON'T.
THAT'S NOT THE SMART PLAY, LOGAN.
SOMETIMES YOU THROW OUT WHAT'S SMART FER WHAT'S RIGHT!
THERE'S MORE AT STAKE HERE THAN YOUR SENSE OF MORALITY! MAGNETO WILL KNOW YOU'RE COMING A MILE AWAY ...
... AND YOU DON'T NEED ME TO TELL YOU WHAT HE CAN DO TO THINGS MADE OF METAL.
I DON'T CARE!
YES YOU DO. THINK OF PIETRO ... AND LORNA. WE CAN'T ENDANGER THEM.

LOGAN-- WHAT--?
JUST CAUGHT A SCENT ON THE BREEZE-- THAT SHOULDN'T BE HERE.
SNIKT
AND IF THAT AIN'T ENOUGH--
-- WE GOT VISITORS!
SUNFIRE-- AND BANSHEE! AND THEY'VE SPOTTED US!
WE'VE GOT TO OUTFLANK THEM-- GET INSIDE MAGNETO'S CITADEL-- AND FIND LORNA.
DOWNSIDE IS-- THE LOCALS MAY TAKE THIS AS AN ATTACK AND RESPOND IN KIND.
WE'LL BURN THAT BRIDGE WHEN WE COME TO IT, FROSTY.
DON'T SAY "BURN" WHEN YOU'RE ON THE ICE SLIDE.
BAD LUCK?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
THE PREY FALL TO THEIR DOOM!
WHY DO YOU CONTINUE TO HURL FIRE AT MERE MEAT?
THEY ARE MORE THAN MEAT.
THEY ARE OUR ENEMIES.
MUST SEE THEIR BLACKENED CARCASSES-- MAKE CERTAIN THEY ARE DEAD!

IS IT JUST ME, LOGAN --
-- OR DO THOSE TWO SOUND A LITTLE DIFFERENT TO YOU?
LET'S DISCUSS THIS AFTER YOU SAVE MY TAIL, OKAY?
OH YEAH. RIGHT.
AND HOW'S THIS ICE TOBOGGAN GOING TO STAND UP TO FIERY BLASTS BETTER THAN YOUR SLIDE DID?
IT WON'T.
THE POINT IS TO GET US DOWN BEFORE SHIRO CAN GET OFF ANOTHER SHOT.
THERE! NOW, LET'S GET OUR DEFENSES READY.
WHAT KINDA DEFENSE WE GONNA THROW UP --
-- AGAINST THE WAIL OF A BANSHEE?
WHREEEEEEEEEEEEEE
IN THE WAR BETWEEN FREE-WILL MUTANT AND N'GARAI-POSSESSED MUTANT -- THERE ARE NO NONCOMBATANTS.
SEAN CASSIDY'S SHRIEK RIPS THROUGH THE EARS AND MIND OF EVERY PERSON IN THE CITY -- RENDERING THEM UNCONSCIOUS.
LOGAN, THANKS TO HIS GENETICALLY ENHANCED HEARING, IS ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO SUCH A SONIC ASSAULT.
AND IF WOLVERINE FALLS -- CAN ICEMAN BE FAR BEHIND?

WHILE SUNFIRE SWOOPS DOWN TOWARD THE FALLEN PAIR --
-- THE POSSESSED BANSHEE PEELS OFF FOR THE LOOMING CITADEL.
HE PASSES OVER PERIMETER GUARDS -- BUREAUCRATS AND DIPLOMATS --
-- ALL FELLED BY HIS SOUND AND FURY.
HE CARES NOTHING FOR THEM.
EVEN MAGNETO, COMATOSE AS THE REST, IS NOT HIS PRIMARY REASON FOR SMASHING HIS WAY IN.
IT IS THE FEMALE MEAT NEAR HIM HE HAS COME TO COLLECT --
-- THE ONE THEY CALL LORNA -- OR POLARIS.
STILL, MAGNETO IS AN ENEMY WHO MUST NOT BE SUFFERED TO GO ON LIVING.
AND THE N'GARAI WILL RELISH THE SLAYING ALL THE MORE --
-- IF HE SLAYS IN HIS NATURAL FORM.
CLAWS WILL SLASH INTO THE HELMET'S OPEN FACE --
-- SCOOP OUT FLESH AND BLOOD AND BRAINS --
-- AS IF EMPTYING THE MEREST EGGSHELL.
THWAK
GNNNGG

WHAM!
WHO DARES--?
I AM CALLED PILGRIMM, N'GARAI SLIME.
A RU'TAI!
HAS A RU'TAI COME TO RESCUE MAGNETO?
I COME TO KILL HIM -- OR THE FEMALE -- OR YOU --
-- OR ALL OF YOU!
MY GOAL IS TO DISRUPT BELASCO'S SPELL BY ANY MEANS POSSIBLE --
-- THUS TO PREVENT THE N'GARAI RESURGENCE.
THE MUTANT'S SONIC BLAST-- DOES NOT FAZE YOU!
AND NOW TO --
WHAT INSANITY IS THIS?
EVERY PIECE OF METAL IN THE CHAMBER --
-- FLIES AT ME --
-- ENCASING ME IN AN EVER-THICKENING SHELL!
GOOD ANALYSIS, MONSTER.
BUT, FROM WHAT I SAW AS I WAS COMING AROUND --
-- BEFORE I WALTZ AROUND WITH YOU --

-- I BETTER DISPOSE OF THE SMALL FRY!
THRAKK
SOMETHING HAS GONE AMISS!
WHAT ENTITY COULD TREAT A N'GARAI SO?
SO THAT'S WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST --
-- N'GARAI IN MUTANTS' CLOTHING!
WELL, MISTER, YOU COULD STILL USE ANOTHER COAT --
-- ANOTHER COAT OF ICE!
IT WAS A MISTAKE TO TURN MY BACK UPON THE FALLEN MEAT--
--BUT--
-- A MISTAKE EASILY RECTIFIED!
HSSSSSSSSSS

NOW, BEFORE I SEE TO MY **FELLOW N'GARAI**, I MUST DEAL WITH--
AH!
THERE YOU ARE, MEAT!
FROZEN MEAT-- BUT MEAT NONETHELESS!
MEAT RIPE FOR THE **ROASTING!**
THE N'GARAI IN SUNFIRE'S BODY FIRES A DISABLING **FLAME BLAST**.
TOO LATE, HE REALIZES HE'S BEEN **TRICKED** --
-- AS IT BOUNCES OFF SCORES OF **REFLECTING SURFACES!**
IN THE MOMENTS THE N'GARAI WAS ENCASED WITHIN THAT BLOCK OF ICE --
-- BOBBY DRAKE **SURROUNDED** HIM WITH A LARGER, MANY-FACETED **GLOBE** OF ICE.
NOW, FIRING AT A **CARVED "ICEMAN"**, THE N'GARAI **HEATS UP** THAT SURROUNDING GLOBE.
IN THE SPACE OF A **HEARTBEAT** --
-- HE CREATES A MONSTROUS **FLASH FLOOD** --
-- THAT SWEEPS HIM IGNOMINIOUSLY **AWAY!**

NO TIME TO TRY AND BRING *LOGAN* AROUND.
GOT TO FIND *LORNA*...
THOK!
METAL JAVELINS -- COMING DOWN *RAPID-FIRE* --
-- FORMING A *CAGE* AROUND ME!
WHAT ARE YOU *DOING* HERE, BOBBY?
LORNA? IS THAT REALLY *YOU* --
-- OR ARE YOU *N'GARAI*, LIKE SUNFIRE AND BANSHEE?
N'GARAI? IS *THAT* WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT?
YOU STILL SHOULDN'T HAVE COME.
I WON'T STAND IDLY BY WHILE YOU MAKE DECISIONS THAT MAY *RUIN YOUR LIFE!*
AND *I* REFUSE TO HAVE THAT SAME *ARGUMENT* AGAIN.
STILL, WE'D BEST *TABLE* OUR DISPUTE FOR THE MOMENT.
STAND BACK. I'LL RELEASE YOU.
NO NEED.
YOU'D BE *AMAZED* WHAT HAPPENS TO METALS --
PLINK
-- WHEN THEY'RE EXPOSED TO TEMPERATURES NEAR *ABSOLUTE ZERO.*
IMPRESSIVE! I NEVER FELT SO MUCH AS A *CHILL.*
COLD HANDS, *WARM HEART.*
I NEVER *DOUBTED* THE WARMTH OF YOUR HEART, BOBBY.
I COULD JUST NEVER *RETURN* IT IN EQUAL MEASURE.

WHATEVER. RIGHT NOW, LET'S FOLLOW THE DRIPPING REMNANTS OF MY LITTLE "FLOOD."
THERE'S "SUNFIRE" -- IN THAT CONSTRUCTION SITE -- STILL OUT -- -- WITH A CATARACT OF WATER STILL FALLING ON HIM.
AND WE DO WHAT?
I FREEZE THE WHOLE SHEBANG, ENCASING HIM IN ICE ALL OVER AGAIN. ONLY, THIS ICE IS COLD ENOUGH TO KEEP HIM UNCONSCIOUS IN HYPERTHERMIC SUSPENSION.
HE SHOULDN'T GIVE US ANY MORE TROUBLE.
ICEMAN AND POLARIS TURN AWAY.
BIG MISTAKE.
"SUNFIRE" ABRUPTLY AWAKES... HIS FEATURES MORPHING INTO THEIR TRUE FORM.
AND WITH A DEMON FACE COMES -- DEMON STRENGTH!
KRAAAKK
BOBBY -- LOOK OUT! YOUR ICE DIDN'T HOLD HIM!
THEN I'LL JUST HAVE TO TRY SOMETHING ELSE, WON'T I?

SOK
LIKE MAYBE A LEFT TO THE JAW!
YOU HURT HIM!
INSOLENT MEAT!
HNNNH!
BOBBY!
HE'S DOWN.
TIME TO PULL MY WEIGHT!
BUT EVEN AS THE SUNFIRE-N'GARAI BECOMES HOPELESSLY ENWRAPPED IN STREAMERS OF MAGNETIC ENERGY --
-- A SUDDEN SONIC SCREAM PLAYS HAVOC WITH THE EQUILIBRIUM OF LORNA'S INNER EAR.
THE RESULT:
INSTANT VERTIGO ...
... AND OVERWELMING NAUSEA.
EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
AND POLARIS GOES DOWN BENEATH THE WITHERING ASSAULT OF THE N'GARAI WHO WEARS THE BODY -- BUT NO LONGER THE FACE -- OF BANSHEE.

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE -- WE ARE IN DEATH.
AN INSTANT MORE, AND THE MOMENTARILY VICTORIOUS N'GARAI WOULD FACE TERROR FROM OVERHEAD -- IN THE FORM OF THE OMINOUS RU'TAI CALLED PILGRIMM.
BUT INSTEAD --
SNIKT
THAT NOISE --
JUST THE SOUND OF ADAMANTIUM CLAWS SNAPPING INTO PLACE!
I TOLD BOBBY BEFORE THAT I SMELLED SOMETHING -- SOMETHING THAT DIDN'T BELONG.
NOT IN GENOSHA --
-- NOT EVEN ON EARTH!
I WELCOME THIS CONTEST, MUTANT.
AND PERHAPS THE X-MAN CALLED WOLVERINE IS THROWN JUST A LITTLE BIT OFF HIS GAME --
-- BY THE REALIZATION THAT THE RU'TAI IS TELLING THE TRUTH.

THE PAIR ARE STILL **FLAILING** AND **FIGHTING** WHEN THEY STRIKE THE GROUND FAR BELOW.
IT NEVER OCCURS TO **LORNA DANE** TO **ASK** LOGAN IF HE WANTS HELP.
SHE MERELY **ACTS.**
METAL OBJECTS MOVE TOWARD HER LIKE MOTHS DRAWN TO AN UNSEEN FLAME.
METAL SHAVINGS FORM A TORRENT THAT WASHES TOWARD HER LIKE LIVING **MERCURY.**
METAL **FLOWS** OVER HER BODY FROM SOLIDS AND LIQUIDS ALIKE...
...**COATING** HER FROM HEAD TO TOE ...
...TILL HER **EVERY INCH** IS COVERED IN **GLEAMING CHROME.**
HER PURPOSE IS SERVED: SHE GETS THE RU'TAI'S **ATTENTION.**
WITH INHUMAN STRENGTH, HE HURLS LOGAN AWAY --
-- AND TURNS TOWARDS THIS **NEW** CHALLENGER!
COME ON!
HIT ME WITH YOUR **BEST SHOT!**
AND HE **DOES.**
ZZZATCH
THE FIRST TIME, EXCEPT FOR THE **IMPACT** --
-- THE BLOW HAS **NO EFFECT.**
BUT PILGRIMM **DOESN'T STOP** AFTER ONE BLOW.
ZZZATCH
OOOPH!
AND **THIS** TIME, LORNA SEES, WITH **HORROR** -- HIS CLAWS HAVE CUT **DEEP, DEEP GOUGES** IN THE METAL, WHICH ALONE SHIELDS HER FROM A **GRISLY, SCARLET END.**

ONE MOMENT, PILGRIMM IS LOOMING ABOVE LORNA LIKE THE **ANGEL OF DEATH**.
HRAAIII!
THE NEXT, HE **SHRIEKS** IN SURPRISE AND TERROR AS HE IS STRUCK FROM BEHIND BY AN **ENERGY BLAST** THAT RENDS HIM LIKE A **THOUSAND RAZORS**...
...AND HE **VANISHES** IN A BURST OF ARCANE ETHER.
I KILLED THE **RU'TAI**, MEAT. NOW I KILL **YOU**.
YOU DIDN'T KILL **ANYBODY**, UGLY.
NOW JUST STAND STILL WHILE I CUT YOU A FEW NEW **MOUTHS** TO GRIN WITH!
YOU'VE HEARD THE EXPRESSION: "A SOLID WALL OF SOUND."
EEEEEEEE
WOLVERINE WAS JUST **HIT** BY ONE.
HE'LL NOT BOTHER US FOR A TIME. NOW YOU--
AAHHRRR
WHAT?
BOBBY! HOW --?
I MADE THE AIR AROUND HIM **SUPER-COLD**.
WHEN HE **BREATHED** IN, THE BLISTERING **CHILL** SCORCHED THE MEMBRANES OF HIS **THROAT** --
-- LESS LIKE FREEZING THAN BEING ON **FIRE!**
YOU MUST HAVE EXPENDED FAR TOO MUCH EFFORT, MEAT...

...TO BE ABLE TO DO IT AGAIN!
STOP!
BOBBY HAS BEEN BATTERED TOO MUCH...
...AND HIS DEMON-FOE IS POWERED BY MORE THAN HUMAN OR MUTANT MIGHT.
AS FAST AS HE REGENERATES HIS ICE SHIELD, THE N'GARAI-SUNFIRE DISSOLVES IT AWAY AGAIN.
A FEW MOMENTS MORE, AND HIS FLESH WILL MELT BEFORE THE FIERY ASSAULT AS WELL.
DON'T KILL HIM!
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I CAME FOR YOU, MEAT!
DROP YOUR METAL DEFENSES-- SURRENDER-- AND I WILL SPARE THIS ICY WARRIOR.
D-DONT DO IT, LORNA!
THE DAY -- YOU CAN TRUST A N'GARAI --!
I'VE -- NO CHOICE.
N'GARAI! LOOK!
I'VE WILLED MY ARMOR TO FLOW OFF ME.
LEAVE HIM ALONE!
I AM... YOURS.

FOR A LONG MOMENT, THE BANSHEE THAT IS **NOT** BANSHEE STUDIES THE FACE OF THE PLEADING, NOW-VULNERABLE FEMALE.
THEN --
THRAKK
SHE IS NOT CONSCIOUS TO SEE **ICEMAN** RUSH FORWARD, HEEDLESS OF HIS OWN SAFETY --
-- OR TO NOTE THE N'GARAI-SUNFIRE'S **POWERFUL BLOW** THAT FELLS HIM.
ARCANE SPELLS ARE MUTTERED ...
... SPELLS NEVER MEANT TO BE RENDERED BY **HUMAN THROATS** ...
...AS THE N'GARAI STEAL AWAY THE **SOUL ESSENCES** OF **LORNA DANE** AND **BOBBY DRAKE**.
THEN, IN A BLINDING BURST OF **UNEARTHLY ENERGY** --
-- THEY **VANISH,** LEAVING BEHIND NO TRACE BUT TWO UNMOVING FORMS.

A HEARTBEAT LATER...
AGAIN I ARRIVE **TOO LATE!**
YET, THESE BATTLES ARE BUT **PRELUDES** TO THE **TRUE** CONFRONTATION.
MY LIMITED RESOURCES MUST BE **HUSBANDED** TILL THEN.
A **HARD** DECISION, BUT A **NECESSARY** ONE.
THE **RIGHT** ONE.
LORNA -- BOBBY -- LET ME DRAW YOUR **LIFE ESSENCES** INTO THE **SOULSWORD**...
LOWER THAT PIG-STICKER, LADY --
-- OR I BURY THESE **CLAWS** WHERE IT **HURTS!**
LOGAN...
WHO'RE **YOU?**
I AM **MAGIK**.
BULL! ILLYANA RASPUTIN IS **DEAD!** AN' YOU AIN'T HER!
LOOK AT ME, LOGAN. **TRUST** ME.
YOU, OF **ALL** THE X-MEN, SHOULD BE ABLE TO SENSE THE **TRUTH**.
LOGAN LOOKS... AND SAYS NOTHING.
BUT HE SHEATHES HIS CLAWS.
YOUR STRENGTH IS NEEDED **ELSEWHERE,** LOGAN.
I WANT TO **END** THE N'GARAI THREAT ONCE AND FOR **ALL**...
...BUT I NEED YOUR HELP.
YOU **GOT** IT, DARLIN'!
AND THEY **VANISH** TOGETHER... EVEN BEFORE THEIR HANDS CAN CLASP.
NEXT SPELL THE 4TH: LIGHT THE FIRE!